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King Sargon's Jars

A Farce in One Act

by

ANN FURLONG



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C H I C A G O

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King Sargon's Jars

A Farce in One Act

FOR THREE MEN AND THREE WOMEN

CHARACTERS

AUNT MIRANDA.....*who rules*
UNCLE HENRY.....*who is ruled*
NANCY.....*Aunt Miranda's niece*
BOB.....*Aunt Miranda's nephew-in-law—almost*
SUSAN.....*who never gossips*
JIM.....*an archaeologist*

PLACE: *The living-room in Aunt Miranda's home.*

TIME: *The present. Late afternoon.*

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

AUNT MIRANDA: She is a woman of fifty, gray-haired, stately, and severe. She is an old guard from the days when young ladies were young ladies. She wears a severely plain dress of rich, dark silk. She carries a piece of knitting and works at it with nervous jerks.

UNCLE HENRY: He is a little bashful man of fifty, gray, and growing bald. He is quite obviously henpecked. His manner toward Miranda is anxious and conciliatory. His way toward Nancy is full of a fatherly tenderness. He wears dark trousers, a lounging coat, slippers, carries a pipe he is always starting to light, and putting away again at the sight or the thought of Aunt Miranda.

NANCY: She is a pretty girl of twenty, sincere, gentle, and lovely. She wears a silk dress of some bright color very becoming to her. If Nancy is brunette, she might wear a dress of intense coral; if she is blond, she might wear a vivid peacock blue, or a deep sea green. Throughout the play Nancy is plainly torn between her love for Bob and her affection for her aunt.

BOB: He is an up-and-coming young business man of about twenty-four or five. He is well-dressed in a handsome light business suit. He's dead in earnest about Nancy, and very upset and troubled by Aunt Miranda's opposition.

SUSAN: She is a twenty-year-old fluff of a girl, impulsive, irresponsible, always ready to tease or to pout, and doing each quite well. She is beautifully dressed in the loveliest of clothes. Her coloring and clothes should contrast with those of Nancy.

JIM: He is a young archaeologist of twenty-five, very bronzed and good-looking, and a match for Susan in irresponsibility and charm. He wears smart travelling clothes.

PROPERTIES

AUNT MIRANDA: Pen, paper and envelope on the desk U C; knitting.

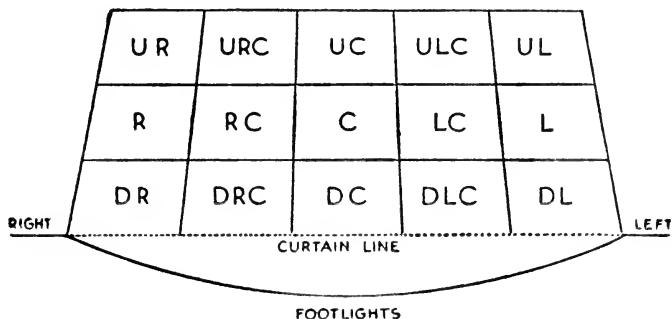
UNCLE HENRY: Newspaper; pipe and pouch of tobacco; bill-fold with money in it.

SUSAN: Compact and lip stick; colorful hand bag; telegram.

NANCY: Telephone directory off L for her to bring on.

JIM: Small bottle of colorless liquid; small piece of slim, dark stone to represent a lizard, or a lizard paper weight; cigarette and matches.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Up stage means away from the footlights, *down stage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

King Sargon's Jars

SCENE: *The living-room of Aunt Miranda's home. There is a combination of old and new in its furnishings that bespeaks the home of people who have lived in it a long time and prospered. There are old things that Aunt Miranda has kept, and new things she has bought from time to time. Thus there are some old Windsor chairs, some very modern lamps, and a luxurious davenport. There are two doors, one R, leading to the entrance, and one L, leading to the interior of the house and to the garden. R C is an easy chair, U C against the wall is a desk with a chair, and L C is the divan with a table back of it. Other furniture may be added as space allows.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: UNCLE HENRY is sitting R C, dozing, nodding. NANCY enters R, crosses to him, leans over and tickles his nose with a piece of paper. After several comic attempts to brush it off, UNCLE HENRY rouses with a start and a snort, sees NANCY, and then settles back with a grin.]

UNCLE HENRY. Hello there, Nancy! Where's Bob?

NANCY. He's—uh—uh—waiting outside.

UNCLE HENRY. Waiting? What for?

NANCY. For—er—er—me to speak to you——

UNCLE HENRY [*smiling broadly*]. Yes?

NANCY. And then—for you to speak to Aunt Miranda.

UNCLE HENRY [*the smile fading from his face*]. Eh? Me to speak to Miranda?

NANCY. You will help us, won't you?

UNCLE HENRY. What do you want me to do?

NANCY [*coaxing*]. Uncle Henry——

BOB [*entering R*]. What's the matter, Nancy? You're so pokey! Did she say O. K.?

NANCY. Not yet. You see Uncle Henry hasn't asked her yet.

BOB. Aw, Mr. Talbot, come on now! Ask her for us! She'll do anything for you!

UNCLE HENRY. Who? Miranda? Shucks, what put that idea in your head?

BOB. Sure she will! Why, a man like you, Mr. Talbot, can just twist a woman right around his finger!

UNCLE HENRY. Yeah? Bob, my boy, Miranda and I have been *one* for twenty-five years, and *she's* been the one!

[BOB and NANCY, with a little groan, sink, disconsolate, on the divan. Then BOB rises determinedly.]

BOB. Well, if you two can't make up your minds I'll do it. I'll tell Aunt Miranda and I'll be firm with her!

UNCLE HENRY. You'll be what?

BOB. Firm!

UNCLE HENRY [*rubbing his head reflectively*]. Have you ever tried being firm with her?

BOB [*sitting down uncertainly*]. Er—er—no.

UNCLE HENRY. I thought not.

BOB. It isn't as if she were dead set against me. She consented to the trial engagement.

UNCLE HENRY. Sure! It's just a matter of a little time till she will agree to the wedding. It's a good thing you youngsters stuck to the provision she laid down about keeping the engagement strictly to yourselves.

NANCY. Yes, it would be swell, if only we had!

UNCLE HENRY. You don't mean you have let it slip! Why Nancy, you had promised!

BOB. It was my fault—telling about it.

NANCY. Mine too. We both wanted the rugs.

UNCLE HENRY. Rugs? What on earth are you talking about?

NANCY. Oh rugs for our apartment when we're married. We

wanted antique oriental rugs and one day I went in and priced some—they cost a fortune!

BOB. So I told Nancy that Jim could pick us up all we could possibly want for next to nothing.

UNCLE HENRY. Jim? He's that young archaeologist your aunt dislikes so much, isn't he?

NANCY. Yes, and he's way off in the interior of Turkey where only camel trains come about twice a year and he can pick up simply marvelous rugs.

UNCLE HENRY. I see. So you wrote him all about it. Well, anyway, he hasn't told so maybe it will be all right.

BOB. Jim never writes news home. We counted on that. And he expected to be out there another year.

NANCY. It seemed absolutely safe.

UNCLE HENRY. So you wrote Jim all about it.

NANCY. Bob did.

BOB. Well, don't blame me. You told me to.

NANCY. I didn't do any such thing! I merely said——

BOB. Say, who wanted the oriental rugs? You or me?

NANCY. Who suggested the idea that Jim could get us some?

BOB. Who said we'd have to explain why or he'd think we were crazy?

[*All through this furious conversation UNCLE HENRY, who has been between the two of them, turns first one way then the other, as first one and then the other speaks.*]

UNCLE HENRY. Yeah, yeah, you both wanted the rugs. So you wrote Jim. Now what's the matter?

BOB. Jim gets back this morning and he goes with Susan Mason and she'll never keep a secret! She couldn't.

NANCY. I'll appeal to him not to tell. I'll explain how important it is.

BOB. He'll have seen Susan long before he comes around here!

NANCY. I'll take care of that! [*She picks up the phone.*] Bittersweet 5083.

BOB. Put it good and strong.

NANCY [*to BOB*]. I will, don't worry. [*Into the phone.*] Hello, Mrs. Brant, this is Nancy calling.—Yes, we'd heard. We're perfectly thrilled at the thought of seeing him.—Mhmm—Mhmm—. Mrs. Brant, I want to leave a message for Jim. Will you ask him to come over here a few minutes as soon as he arrives? —Mhmm—Mhmm—I know that. I wouldn't ask if it weren't so important. Mrs. Brant, please tell him it's *a matter of life and death*. That's all I can say. Good-bye.

[NANCY *hangs up and wipes her brow with her hanky.*]

UNCLE HENRY [*reprovingly*]. Nancy! How could you say that!
NANCY. Well, I'll die if anything more goes wrong with our engagement.

UNCLE HENRY [*reflectively*]. It does seem like your best chance is talking your aunt around before there's any slip up. Susan Mason! [*He goes out R shaking his head.*] Susan Mason!

NANCY [*mournfully*]. We'll have to be very diplomatic.

BOB. Diplomatic, rats! I'm tired of being diplomatic! All we have to do is walk out of that door [*He indicates the door R.*], buy a license, and get married! And we can do it any time we've got the gumption!

NANCY. Oh Bob, I couldn't treat Aunt Miranda that way! She's been like a mother to me ever since I was a baby! She's so proud, too, it would just break her heart.

BOB. All right. That's out then! We'll be diplomatic. How shall we go about it?

NANCY. I know! We'll talk to her about the new Greenwood apartments!

BOB. What's that got to do with us?

NANCY. She's happy over them. The tenants signed a long lease, and Aunt Miranda's putting in canvas walls, and everything.

BOB. But what's canvas walls got to do with us?

NANCY. Goosie! You men never have any more sense than——

BOB. But what *do* canvas walls have to do with us?

NANCY. Silly! We'll start talking about those wonderful apart-

ments, and then we'll work it around to how we'd like to be in our own apartment, see?

BOB. Oh! Say, that's great! Sure! I see it now! I'll say, "Well, I hear those Greenwood apartments are coming along fine!"

NANCY [*enthusiastically*]. And then she'll say, "Marvelously! I'll make enough money on those apartments to——"

BOB. And then I'll say, "Happy homes!"

NANCY. And then you'll sigh, like this—[*Sighs.*] Ahhhh!

BOB. You think I could sigh like that? Okay, then. [*He sighs.*] Ahhhh! And then I'll say, "I wish Nancy and I had our own little home——"

NANCY [*squirming with delight*]. Oh, Bob, that's perfect! And then she'll say, "Well, well, would you rather have a home wedding or a church wedding——"

AUNT MIRANDA [*off L.*]. Nancy! Nancy!

NANCY. Hush!

BOB. What was I to say?

NANCY. Shhh!

BOB. What am I to start with?

NANCY. Shhh! Greenwood! Canvas walls!

BOB [*jumping up nervously, straightening his coat, adjusting his tie, running a finger around his collar*]. Greenwood walls—canvas tenants—[*Snaps his finger.*] No, darn it! Greenwood tenants—canvas apartments—Nancy, I'll never get this straight!

AUNT MIRANDA [*off L, nearer this time*]. Nancy!

NANCY [*shakily*]. Yes, auntie! Right here!

AUNT MIRANDA [*sweeping in L.*]. Where is the telephone book?

NANCY [*hastening L.*]. I'll find it r—r—r—right away.

AUNT MIRANDA [*turning on BOB*]. Well, young man, you don't seem to be very busy today!

[NANCY, *pausing in the door way, makes frantic motions back to BOB, and says voicelessly, but with exaggerated lip movements, "Tell her!" She goes out L.*]

BOB [*with a gulp*]. Er—Mrs. Talbot, I hear your Greenlawn apartments are coming along just fine.

AUNT MIRANDA [*coldly, as she sits at the desk U C and draws a sheet of note paper to her*]. Greenlawn?

BOB. Er—er—that isn't right, is it? I—I—meant Greenfield.

AUNT MIRANDA [*turning toward him, coldly*]. Are you trying to talk about the Greenwood apartments?

BOB. Yes, yes—all the canvas tenants—er—canvas walls, and—and——

AUNT MIRANDA. Don't mention Greenwood to me!

BOB [*the wind out of his sails*]. Uh? Something wrong?

AUNT MIRANDA. Oh, no! Just a water main has burst, and the canvas walls you're trying to talk about are ruined! That's all! It'll take two years to break even on that place. Greenwood apartments! Humph!

[*She turns back to her letter, and BOB, with the wind out of his sails, sits disconsolate. NANCY enters quickly L, and puts the book on the desk for her aunt.*]

NANCY [*briskly*]. Aunt Miranda, Bob and I were just talking——

BOB [*signaling frantically to NANCY*]. Ahem! Ahem!

NANCY. We were just talking about those lovely new Greenwood apartments—and about how much fun——

BOB [*signaling again*]. Ahem!

NANCY. And we just thought, when we talked about those lovely apartments——

AUNT MIRANDA [*cutting in ironically*]. The less you say about those lovely apartments now, the better! The lovely water mains have burst and let lovely rusty water all over the lovely canvas walls, and I'll be paying the lovely bills for the next six months. I'm just writing to my lawyer now about those lovely Greenwood apartments!

[*She looks for an address in the directory, and bends again over her letter. BOB and NANCY sink, disconsolate, on the divan. BOB pantomimes stabbing himself, and NANCY pantomimes cutting her throat. UNCLE HENRY comes back in R, carrying*

the newspaper with him. He has it spread out, looking at it, so that he does not notice just who is in the room.]

UNCLE HENRY. By the way, Bob, I cleaned up a mighty tidy little sum on that tip the other day.

[AUNT MIRANDA, *still unnoticed by* UNCLE HENRY, *turns toward him. BOB tries frantically to get his attention, but UNCLE HENRY is still engrossed in his paper.*]

BOB. Ahem! Er—Mr. Talbot——

UNCLE HENRY. Five hundred dollars I cleared! That wasn't bad for a new hand in the game, eh?

BOB. Really, Mr. Talbot, I——

UNCLE HENRY [*settling down comfortably with his paper*]. Oh, don't worry about Nancy. She knows her old uncle is a sinner, don't you, pet?

AUNT MIRANDA [*rising majestically*]. Henry Talbot!

UNCLE HENRY [*jumping all over*]. Eh? What? [*He drops his newspaper, tries to pick it up, steps on it, tears it, drops it again, and goes through all sorts of frantic gestures in his effort to collect his wits.*]

AUNT MIRANDA. Do you mean to tell me you've been gambling?

UNCLE HENRY. Now, really, my dear, I——

AUNT MIRANDA [*wheeling on BOB*]. And you've been egging him on to it, have you?

UNCLE HENRY. Now, now, my dear, I wasn't gambling at all. I just bought a few shares of a good stock, and sold them at a very tidy little advance.

AUNT MIRANDA. That's enough out of you, Henry! Robert, why did you encourage Henry to gamble?

BOB. Really, Mrs. Talbot, he just bought some stocks of P and B X. That's the company I'm with, you know——

AUNT MIRANDA. I didn't know. So you're with a gambling concern, are you?

BOB. My heavens, no! It's an investment house!

AUNT MIRANDA. And yet you urged Henry to gamble!

BOB. Oh, no! You see, in an investment house everyone is supposed to ask two people every day to buy stock. You see how that is——

AUNT MIRANDA. I don't see!

BOB. Just a little matter of routine, that's all! I just say to the janitor and the elevator man, [*Rattling it off without a particle of expression or concern.*] "Want to buy stock in P and B X? Want to buy stock in P and B X?" And then that's done with for the day! See?

AUNT MIRANDA. No, I don't see! Nancy, I'm very glad your engagement to Robert has never been announced!

NANCY. What?

AUNT MIRANDA. Because I'll never consent to your marrying a gambler!

UNCLE HENRY [*trying to brighten the occasion a little*]. You married me, my dear!

AUNT MIRANDA [*crossing majestically L, and wheeling*]. Henry! Just because I threw myself away is no reason for permitting Nancy to make an equally unfortunate mistake. [*She goes out L.*]

NANCY [*sinking into a chair*]. Oh, dear!

BOB [*sinking into a chair*]. That's——

UNCLE HENRY [*following suit*]. That!

NANCY. We should have explained better.

BOB [*rising*]. Come on. Let's start before we get too scared.

NANCY [*also rising*]. We can be diplomatic. [*She gives him a mocking glance.*] Like we were just now. [*But she slips her hand in his arm and they go out L.*]

[*As BOB and NANCY go out L, BOB continues talking until his voice dies away off stage.*]

BOB. I'll just say, "Now look here, Aunt Miranda——"

UNCLE HENRY [*looking after them and shaking his head*]. Good luck, you two! You'll need it!

[*UNCLE HENRY reopens his newspaper, looks at the front page and makes a clucking sound of disapproval. Then he turns to*

the editorial page, folds the paper conveniently and begins to read as SUSAN enters R.]

SUSAN. Yoo-hoo!

UNCLE HENRY. Oh, hello Susan!

SUSAN. Hello Mr. Talbot. Where's Nancy?

UNCLE HENRY. Nancy is busy just now, but I expect her back right away.

SUSAN. I'll just sit down and wait. [*She leans back sighing.*] I'm perfectly dead. Been shopping all morning. I bought the dearest little cordonette dress with a beret and scarf in a contrasting shade of— [*She discovers that UNCLE HENRY is furtively glancing at his paper during this recital.*] Why Mr. Talbot!

UNCLE HENRY. I beg your pardon, my dear, you said the scarf and beret—?

SUSAN [*crossing to him and affectionately rumpling his hair*]. Oh never mind them!

UNCLE HENRY. Susan, have you seen Jim yet?

SUSAN. Not yet, but he'll be here 'most any—

UNCLE HENRY. You haven't? My, that's fine! That's fine!

SUSAN. What's fine about it?

UNCLE HENRY. Er—er—now, my dear, I didn't mean—

SUSAN. And where's Nancy? I have a bone to pick with her! [*She pulls a telegram out of her pocket.*] Just listen to this! I got it from Jim this morning! "Love to Nancy and Bob stop tell happy pair I came in like an immigrant with a bale of rugs for their home, stop——"

UNCLE HENRY [*sinking back with a groan*]. Ohhhh!

SUSAN. Can you beat that!

UNCLE HENRY. No, that wins everything.

SUSAN. And I'm her best friend, and Nancy never told me a word! I'm certainly going to give her a piece of my mind!

UNCLE HENRY. You see, Susan, it was this way. Mrs. Talbot insisted that the engagement must be an absolute secret, and if she ever knows it got out, she'll forbid them to marry.

SUSAN. That's certainly no reason for Nancy not to tell me! Her

very best friend! She certainly knew she could trust me, didn't she?

UNCLE HENRY. Er—er—yes. You haven't told any one about that telegram have you?

SUSAN. Of course not! Didn't I just tell you Nancy could trust me?

UNCLE HENRY. Thank goodness! Miranda's in a temper right now. If we can just keep this whole thing perfectly still until it all blows over, maybe Bob and Nancy can get married in peace.

SUSAN. Oh, can't they get married right away? And here I was planning all about my bridesmaid costume with Mrs. Sloan!

UNCLE HENRY. With Mrs.— You didn't tell *her* about it, did you?

SUSAN. Of course not! I never gossip! But you see I was down there for a fitting right after I got the telegram, and——

UNCLE HENRY. But you didn't tell Mrs. Sloan anything, did you?

SUSAN. Of course I didn't. I just asked her what bridesmaids were wearing this year.

UNCLE HENRY. Is that all?

SUSAN. Absolutely.

UNCLE HENRY. You're sure?

SUSAN. Of course. We talked about having each bridesmaid wear a different pastel shade, and I said I supposed Mrs. Talbot would want us all to wear pink or blue instead.

UNCLE HENRY. You said that to Mrs. Sloan?

SUSAN. Yes—but that's every word I said!

UNCLE HENRY. That's enough! She's the worst gossip in seven states! Where'd you go after you left the dressmaker's?

SUSAN. To lunch with Annette Crawford.

UNCLE HENRY [*holding his head*]. Oh, my heavens!

SUSAN. Why what's the matter?

UNCLE HENRY. What did you say to her?

SUSAN. You mean about Nancy and Bob? Not a word!

UNCLE HENRY. Thank heaven!

SUSAN. All I said to her was that I thought it was mighty funny Bob should write about the engagement to Jim, when Nancy hadn't said a thing even to her very best friends.

UNCLE HENRY. What?

SUSAN. But that's all. I didn't say another word.

UNCLE HENRY. Now you've done it! When Miranda hears that, she'll be mad as a hornet, and she never will let them get married! Wait till I— [*And he hurries out L.*]

SUSAN [*turning after him*]. But what's the excitement? I——

[*He is gone, so SUSAN shrugs and turns back, takes out her compact and starts to touch up her face. JIM enters R.*]

JIM. Susan!

SUSAN [*running to his arms*]. Jim!

JIM. Susan! [*He holds her and looks at her.*] It seems like a different world!

SUSAN. If that's the way you feel, why did you come to Nancy's house first?

JIM. Gosh! Nancy sent word she must see me—a life and death matter!

SUSAN. Oh, that? It must be about the engagement. It's to be kept secret, you mustn't tell anyone.

JIM. That's so! Bob told me that when he wrote! And like an idiot I let it slip in that wire, didn't I?

SUSAN. Well, don't worry! Just because *you* can't keep a secret isn't any sign *I* can't!

JIM. That's a good girl! Say, I've got great news for you, little girl!

SUSAN. Honestly?

JIM. Yes, the last time I was in Istamboul——

SUSAN [*with an exasperated sigh*]. Oh, it's something about those old ruins, is it? I s'pose you dug up a pair of beads with inscriptions.

JIM. No, now, Susan, listen——

SUSAN. Or some of those stone animals the rich Assyrians had on the front lawn two thousand years ago? To me they're just a herd of cast-iron deer off a scrap heap.

JIM [*amused*]. Oh, now, Sue, leave Archeology a leg to stand on!

SUSAN. Well, [*With a bored sigh.*] what did you find?

JIM [*taking a small object from his pocket and handing it to her*]. Look.

SUSAN [*reaching out her hand for it and then drawing back with a shudder*]. Ooo! I hate those reptilian paper weights!

JIM [*shoving it nearer her*]. Look at it. Feel it!

SUSAN. Ooh! Take it away. It's too lifelike. Where did you dig up such a nasty lizard?

JIM [*impressively*]. I didn't dig it up. Ten minutes ago that lizard was alive and wriggling.

SUSAN [*edging nearer and touching the object with an experimental finger*]. Huh? But it feels like rock.

JIM. Right. It is rock now. [*Reaches in his pocket.*] And this new-born kitten——

SUSAN [*utterly disgusted now and backing away*]. Never mind showing me. Take them away. I had no idea you had such disgusting habits.

JIM. That's a sweet welcome to give a man who makes the biggest discovery in years and comes tearing straight across the ocean to you! Listen, Sue——

SUSAN. I'll listen as long as you keep to the point. But if you start talking research I'll just clear out till it blows over.

JIM [*making a gesture of tearing his hair*]. And this—this blond millstone is to be the wife of an archaeologist!

SUSAN. Cheer up. I've heard rumors to the contrary.

JIM. Just let me tell you about my big discovery and we'll see. The last time I was in Istamboul a merchant in the bazaar eased up to me and told me he could take me to a man who had "written stone jars" to sell. That means jars with inscriptions on them.

SUSAN [*uninterested*]. I had supposed so.

JIM. I went along with him into a dark hovel, and sure enough, there was a lousy old boy with a pair of stone jars, sealed up and covered with cuneiform inscriptions.

SUSAN [*still uninterested*]. So you bought them.

JIM. Right. For two dollars apiece. The old boy swore he got them from the tomb of a great king. I managed to decipher the inscriptions.

SUSAN [*yawning*]. I'm on the edge of my chair!

JIM [*impressively*]. Sue, the contents of those jars had been compounded by command of Sargon, King of Kings!

SUSAN. So what?

JIM [*rising impatiently*]. Well, I'll tell you this much, young lady. We can get married right away!

SUSAN. And use what for money, wampum?

JIM [*impressively*]. Sue, the stuff in those jars will keep you in Paris gowns the rest of your life!

SUSAN [*rising and whirling*]. What?

JIM. I thought that would wake you up.

SUSAN. Count ten slowly, and then answer me. Did you say *Paris gowns*?

JIM. Right.

SUSAN. Oh, Jim, those precious darling lovely old jars! Tell me all about them!

JIM. It's hard to believe, Sue, but the merest touch of the stuff from one of those jars will turn anything instantly to stone.

SUSAN. No! Oh, that's awful! What if someone got it on him and turned to stone?

JIM. In the other jar is the antidote. You touch the object with the second liquid, and it turns back to what it was first. If it's a person, he won't even know a thing has happened.

SUSAN. How do you know?

JIM. I tried it on a native boy.

SUSAN. He had more nerve than I would!

JIM. As a matter of fact he didn't know. He happened to be asleep at the time. A darn good looking statue he made. I hated to use the antidote on him.

SUSAN. One thing I don't quite see. How do you expect to make money from this discovery?

JIM [*striding up and down*]. That part I haven't clear worked out yet. But there'll be hundreds of ways of turning it to advantage. Take cold storage—it would save the expense of refrigeration. You could just turn the animals to stone until you were ready to use them.

SUSAN [*doubtfully*]. Y-yes, I suppose so.

JIM [*full of the subject and gesturing*]. Or I might set up as a sculptor. They get big money. Think how much more natural my statues would be. The other guys wouldn't be in the running. And look at the service I could give! A regular sculptor takes a long time to do a statue but I could supply an absolutely lifelike stone dog or horse or whatever they wanted at less than a day's notice.

SUSAN [*a bit doubtfully*]. I—I suppose so.

JIM. My discovery would do a lot of good too. Look at parents—the tough break they get always having to stay home and look after the family and the kids always waking up and yelling if they have in company.

SUSAN. How would they use it?

JIM. Easiest thing in the world. Just practice the kiddies to take pretty poses, like this. [JIM *demonstrates standing on tiptoe, one leg stretched out, one arm raised and the other hand holding out an imaginary skirt.*] Then just touch them with the stuff and set them out around the lawn or around the house as ornaments. Then the mother could have a quiet afternoon at the movies or entertaining her friends. It would mean a lot to her.

SUSAN. Have you tried it on a white person yet?

JIM. No, but I'm going to, first chance.

SUSAN. I doubt if you get many volunteers.

JIM. Oh well, I can get some criminal or some one that's about to commit suicide, or some mean guy that's making everyone miserable and wouldn't be missed if it fails. I'll try it on him.

SUSAN. And you think it will make you rich?

JIM. I think it will make *us* rich. I didn't say anything before because I didn't dare ask you to live on an archaeologist's salary. But it's us together from now on! [*He catches her hands and starts to swing her around when* UNCLE HENRY *enters L.*]

JIM [*not too cordially*]. Oh hello, Mr. Talbot.

UNCLE HENRY [*hurriedly*]. Glad to see you back, James. My, my, what a pity you let it slip about the engagement!

JIM. But I only told Sue, and nobody'd ever get it out of her.

UNCLE HENRY. No one but that gossiping dressmaker and gabbling Annette Crawford!

JIM. Why, Susan, you walked all over me for even telling you!

SUSAN. Er—er—well, you see—you—you—see——

JIM. I see you're a fraud!

UNCLE HENRY. Well, well, it may come out all right yet! [*He goes out R.*]

[*NANCY enters L. She is dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief and does not look up.*]

JIM [*heartily*]. Well, here's the little bride! Wait till you see the bale of rugs I brought you.

NANCY [*sniffingly dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief as she puts out her other hand*]. Oh, hello Jim, hello Susan. Th—thanks f—for doing the sh—shopping but we m—may n—never use them! J—just excuse me a m—minute while I p—powder m—my eyes and co—come back. [*She goes out L.*]

JIM. Gosh, what's the matter?

SUSAN. It's just her cranky old Aunt Miranda won't consent to the marriage.

JIM. That is mean. Bob's a grand guy. She'll never find a better. [*He lights a cigarette.*]

[*Another door bangs off stage and* BOB *enters L followed by* AUNT MIRANDA.*]*

BOB [*going to* JIM]. Great to see you old man. Hello Sue.

AUNT MIRANDA [*entering impressively as if under full sail*].

Furthermore, young man, I must ask you not to enter my house again. I owe it to Nancy's dead mother not to let her child marry a gambler!

JIM [*aghast*]. A gambler! Why Jim could never hold his job with P and B X if he gambled. They're a very straight laced firm.

AUNT MIRANDA [*seeing him for the first time*]. Young man, I'd have you know that it is exactly his connection with P and B X that I object to. That company has stock and from owning stock it is only a step to playing the market.

JIM. My word!

AUNT MIRANDA [*with increasing coldness*]. Furthermore, while you are in my house I'll have to ask you to refrain from smoking that vile weed.

[JIM *hastily removes the cigarette from his mouth and* AUNT MIRANDA *sweeps majestically out. At the door she pauses.*]

AUNT MIRANDA. I will rejoin you in a moment. Excuse me please.

[*The men bow. SUSAN murmurs indistinguishably. AUNT MIRANDA goes out L.*]

SUSAN. Wowie!

JIM [*recovering his good temper*]. Why aren't you on your way, Bob? I thought I heard you ordered out into the cold cruel world.

BOB [*grimly*]. Wrong. You heard me ordered never to return. So it's up to me not to leave till she's changed her mind or I'll never get back. I'll look up Nancy and be back in a minute. [*He goes out L.*]

JIM. Seems to me the thing for them to do is just walk out and get married and let their cranky old Aunt fume if she wants to.

SUSAN. You don't know Nancy or you'd never suggest that. She knows how proud Mrs. Talbot is and she'd never hurt her publicly like that. Under all that sweetness, Nancy is stubborn too—she wants her Aunt's consent and she's going to wait for it.

JIM. Waiting isn't much in my line.

SUSAN. They may have to wait forever. Mother's known Mrs. Talbot since grade school and she says she's stubborn as a rock.

JIM. Stubborn as a rock. Say, that rock stuff gives me an idea. Do you see this? [*He takes a small vial such as druggists use to dispense bulk perfume from his pocket and places it on the table.*]

SUSAN [*edging near it*]. I'm afraid to look at it almost. It's some of the stuff from King Sargon's jar, isn't it?

JIM. It is. I was taking this sample over to the laboratory to get it analyzed so we can depend on having a supply of it when this is exhausted. But I am going to use it for another purpose now. There [*He points impressively at the bottle.*] stands the deliverer of Bob and Nancy!

[*As he speaks the last words AUNT MIRANDA appears at the door L, about to enter. She stops at his words and stands perfectly silent and attentive through the lines that follow.*]

SUSAN. Jim! You wouldn't dare! It would be a crime!

JIM. No crime at all. I told you I'd locate some mean guy that was making every one miserable and experiment on him. Well, Aunt Miranda's the one. She's making every one miserable. Her heart is stone already.

SUSAN. But even if you turn her to stone what good would that do Bob and Nancy?

JIM. That's easy. I'll tell Nancy that I won't turn her aunt back until she and Bob are married.

SUSAN [*doubtfully*]. It sounds all right. But I'm kinda scared!

[*AUNT MIRANDA steps out of sight.*]

JIM. You're just jumpy because it's the first time you've seen it work. The antidote's safe. We'll make a turn around the garden until Aunt Miranda comes back. Then we'll try it. [*They go out L.*]

[*A moment later AUNT MIRANDA appears in the door L and comes down angrily to the table.*]

AUNT MIRANDA [*picking up the bottle and looking at it indignantly*]. Hmm! The impertinent young upstart. First a grave robber and now a criminal. Well! I'll take care of this! [*She goes out holding the bottle at arm's length and returns a moment later and replaces it on the table. Then she seats herself and begins to knit. Her lips are compressed.*]

[JIM and SUSAN enter L. They look at each other just inside the door. SUSAN indicates AUNT MIRANDA with a nod of her head and raises her eyebrows inquiringly at JIM. He nods and advances towards the table.]

AUNT MIRANDA. You still here?

SUSAN. Nancy seemed so troubled we hated to go.

AUNT MIRANDA [*settling in her chair and continuing to knit*]. Humph! She'll get over it.

JIM. If you'd consent to her marrying Bob, they'd surely——

AUNT MIRANDA. Humph! How'd you know they're engaged?

JIM. Er—er—well, you see as a matter of fact——

AUNT MIRANDA. So that's the way he keeps his promise, is it? I might have known a gambler wouldn't keep his word!

JIM. Oh, come now, Mrs. Talbot, Bob's no gambler! Why, he couldn't gamble if he worked for that firm! I'm afraid you're all——

AUNT MIRANDA. I'd thank you to mind your own affairs!

JIM. I'm sorry.

AUNT MIRANDA. You ought to be.

JIM. I'll stick to my own affairs, hereafter.

AUNT MIRANDA. A good idea.

JIM. Er—er—by the way, here's something I'd like to show you——

AUNT MIRANDA. What is it? Some heathen discovery? I'm not interested.

JIM. No, really, it's quite——

AUNT MIRANDA. If I were your mother, I'd turn you over my knee! The idea of you traipsing off over there digging up dead men's belongings! Humph!

JIM [*crossing cautiously nearer her with the bottle, slowly loosening the cork as he comes*]. Yes, I expect you're right, Mrs. Talbot. I expect you're right. Just a minute, here; I want to show you how this works. [*With the moistened cork, he touches her wrist.*] There, isn't that——

[*Instantly AUNT MIRANDA stiffens, her eyes close, she drops her knitting and sits as if turned to stone.*]

SUSAN. Oh, Jim! Look at her!

JIM. It works! Hurray! [*Crossing L, calling.*] Bob! Nancy! Bob!

SUSAN [*crossing and touching AUNT MIRANDA with an outstretched finger*]. Gosh, it's scarey!

JIM. Won't they be happy!

[*BOB and NANCY enter L. At first they don't notice AUNT MIRANDA.*]

NANCY [*approaching JIM*]. Jim, it's so good to see you! How well you look!

JIM. Thanks. I have some news for you!

NANCY. What's that?

JIM. You can get married!

NANCY. What?

JIM. You can get married. Look! [*He steps back and exposes AUNT MIRANDA to their view.*]

NANCY. What is it? Oh! Aunt Miranda! Auntie! Oh, what happened! [*She runs to her aunt, touches her, and then draws back.*] Bob!

BOB [*crossing to AUNT MIRANDA'S other side*]. Mrs. Talbot! What's wrong? [*He touches her shoulder, and shakes her. She moves stiffly, and then sits immobile as his hand drops.*] Good heavens, what happened? [*Turns to JIM.*] Were you here when she got this way?

JIM [*cheerily*]. Surest thing you know! And as soon as you two get married——

BOB. What are you talking about?

JIM. Just a little experiment of mine.

NANCY. You mean *you* did it? You turned my own Aunt Miranda into a statue? Oh, Jim, how could you?

JIM. Now, now, Nancy, don't take it that way. I was just doing you a good turn.

BOB. Is that so? And what is your idea of doing us a good turn?

JIM. Er—er—well, how'd I know you'd take it like this? This stuff in this little bottle is a sample I brought back with me. Anyone touched with it turns instantly to stone.

NANCY. No, no, you wouldn't! You couldn't do that to my Aunt Miranda! You wouldn't have let Jim, Susan! Don't you remember how good she's always been to us? The parties we used to have on Saturday, and everything? And how she took us to the shows, and we—we—we— [*Wailing.*] even had box seats!

[NANCY *weeps*. BOB *puts his arm around her, and glares at JIM and SUSAN.*]

SUSAN. Gee, Nancy, I'm awfully sorry. I sort of—of—forget about how—how nice she sometimes is.

BOB. And you thought this was a nice thing to do, did you?

JIM. I thought she was keeping you two from marrying. Great day, I'd think you'd appreciate what I'm trying to do for you!

BOB. I can't see that it's any of your business!

JIM. All right, the next time I try to do someone a good turn, I'll know about it!

SUSAN. Jim, don't quarrel! Please! Go get the other stuff, quick, and wake her up!

NANCY. Wake her up! You mean she'll be all right?

JIM. Surest thing you know! I'll call the house and have mother send it over— [*At the telephone.*] Bittersweet—five—o—eight—three. Yes, thanks.

SUSAN. You see, it was Jim's idea, that you could get married, and then as soon as you did, he'd wake her up, and everything would be okay.

JIM. Hello, mother. Yes, this is Jim. Say, mother, those two stone jars I brought in—Yes, the ones I took straight to my

room—Huh? My stars, no! You know very well I wouldn't try to import liquor! Of course not! What? No! You didn't! NO! NO! But, mother— [*Slowly—as though dazed—he hangs up the telephone, and sets it on the table. He stares at the three, and they huddle in a little bunch, staring at him.*]

SUSAN [*in a whisper*]. What happened?

JIM [*in a flat tone*]. She poured out the stuff.

SUSAN. No! All of it?

JIM. Yes. You know what a temperance worker mother is. When I took those jars so carefully to my room, she thought I'd brought back liquor in them for someone, and she dumped it out and scoured out the jars. It's all gone.

SUSAN. Oh, Jim, there must be something you can give her instead. Think!

JIM [*shaking his head hopelessly*]. That formula hasn't been known for two thousand years. We may not even have the drugs to make it any more. [*He sits down and buries his head in his hands.*] Gosh, I'm sorry!

BOB [*harshly*]. I suppose the next thing is to call the police.

SUSAN [*crossing to JIM protectively and placing her hand on his shoulder*]. Bob! Why they might put him in prison! You wouldn't spoil his life like that!

BOB. What about Aunt Miranda's life!

SUSAN. But you and Nancy can get married now.

BOB. Say, do you think we'd take advantage of her like that? Not much! We've got to notify the authorities, and try to find something to do.

SUSAN. We might hide her and keep it quiet while we tried to work out an antidote.

NANCY. Don't you dare touch her!

JIM. They're right, Sue. Call the cops and let's get it over with.

AUNT MIRANDA [*suddenly rising*]. I agree with you, James, let's get it over with.

[*All four start back from her exclaiming in concert.*]

NANCY. Auntie!

BOB. Mrs. Talbot! Are you all right?

SUSAN. Thank heaven!

JIM. But what happened?

AUNT MIRANDA. Enough! [*She takes the bottle and hands it to JIM sternly.*] Young man, smell this liquid.

JIM [*uncorking the bottle and sniffing*]. My word! Lily of the valley!

SUSAN. B—but what happened to the stuff that was in there?

AUNT MIRANDA. To that heathen mixture? I dumped it out. And I was glad to hear that your mother [*She turns to JIM.*] dumped the rest of it out! The idea of anyone with no more sense than you have running around with stuff as dangerous as that!

JIM [*sinking in a chair*]. Good-bye, discovery!

SUSAN [*following suit*]. Good-bye, Paris gowns!

BOB [*following suit*]. Good-bye, wedding!

NANCY. I don't care! I've got my own dear auntie back!

AUNT MIRANDA [*smiling now, and putting an affectionate arm around NANCY*]. So you're not going to marry Jim unless he can buy you Paris gowns, eh, Susan?

SUSAN. Well, I haven't been asked to.

AUNT MIRANDA. And here this silly niece of mine wants to marry a man before he can even keep her in bungalow aprons.

BOB. Now, really, Aunt Miranda, I could get Nancy bungalow aprons—once in a while! You see, those stocks——

[*He grins at her, and she finally smiles back.*]

AUNT MIRANDA. Maybe you are a good business man, after all, Bob! Well, [*Briskly.*] you'll get one of the Greenwood apartments for a wedding present.

NANCY. Aunt Miranda!

SUSAN. Jim, I don't really want the Paris gowns! I'd rather fry your breakfast bacon than wear all the——

AUNT MIRANDA. Now, that's talking! And I'll see that Jim's mother gets you another one of the apartments——

SUSAN [*running to AUNT MIRANDA*]. Ooo, you're just great!

[UNCLE HENRY *comes creeping quietly in, L, with his purse in his hand.*]

UNCLE HENRY. Miranda, my love——

AUNT MIRANDA [*stiffly*]. Yes, Henry——

UNCLE HENRY. About this five hundred——

AUNT MIRANDA. Give it to these four newly-weds, and we'll forget about it.

UNCLE HENRY. Fine! Fine! Bless their hearts!

JIM. Aunt Miranda, you're a perfect brick!

AUNT MIRANDA. Not brick, James. Stone!

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